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EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE.

Observations at the National Capital—

What Congress is Doing—Presidential Speculations—A Talk with Alexander H. Stephens.

WASHINGTON, February 16, 1880.

Correspondence of the Intelligencer.

When your correspondent first began

coming to the National Capital, nearly 25

years ago, it was a very different place

from what it is now. It was then simply

a straggling and unsightly Southern town.

The streets were mud streets and without

a system of drainage. The private dwellings

were for the most part of a very thrift-

less and unkempt character. Even Penn-

sylvania avenue, the Broadway of the

city, was a bedraggled looking thorough-

fare, and very muddy in bad weather.

The people had the general characteris-

tics of the South as respects a lack of

energy. It seemed as if they had no

ambition to make the city anything more

than a winter rendezvous, instead of the

beautiful capital of a great nation where

population, wealth and refinement would

come and find a permanent home. The

District of Columbia was simply a South-

ern camping ground, and the slave

element of the South was almost as

dominant and prospective here as at Richmond

in all official and social circles.

The war reversed the whole direction

and tone of affairs in Washington. The

city was practically divided from the South

for four years, and during that time the

North came here to stay. Not only to

stay, but to make the city a place fit to

be a desirable class of people. The

immense aggregation of interests

here during the war brought almost every

body to Washington at some period of the

great struggle, and thousands who came

on transient business remained for one

cause or another as permanent residents.

The consequence is that from being a poor

scrubby town of rickety and shanties,

Washington has become a great

thriving city of 150,000 people. It is now

a Capital to be proud of. Its streets are

simply magnificent. There are no more

them in the country. They are broad and

thoroughly paved with asphalt, and

carriages run over them as smoothly and

almost as noiselessly as if they were laid

on hardened rubber. In fact you would

think the paving was a rubber mixture

of some sort. It has that color and texture

and has a sort of a spring like rubber

feeling when you walk or ride over it. The

composition used is made of asphalt, lime

and fine gravel, and it fits the broad

streets and avenues as compactly and

firmly as if it had been poured upon

them and allowed to harden, which indeed

was the case to a certain extent.

The draining of the city is on a scale

keeping with its splendid paving. The

old surface drainage is no where to be

seen. All is cleanliness and tidiness.

Then, too, the parks, public grounds, cir-

cles, squares and all open places, are

beautified to correspond with the im-

provements alluded to. Green plants, shrub-

bery, statuary and monuments are to be

found in every part of the city. The old

frame houses have given place to modern

brick architecture, and no city of its size

can boast such a number and variety of

beautiful residences. The hotels and board-

ing houses have also greatly improved in

number and character, but are not yet what

they should be and will be. The latter,

however, have particularly improved. In-

stead of old houses, built in early times

and by piece meal, with low ceilings and

small apartments, dimly lighted and

scantily furnished, there are now a

number of capacious houses built after

the best models in New York, where fam-

ilies can have home comforts in the shape

of large and handsome apartments.

All in all, Washington is a city proud

of, and I am not astonished to find that

people of wealth and refinement are

daily coming here from all parts of the

country to live. The society thus formed

meets in attractiveness as the nation

accumulates population and wealth, and

it requires no prophetic eye to discern a

time in the future when Washington will

certainly be the greatest and most brilliant

capital in the world.

## SOCIAL ATTRACTIONS.

Speaking of this future of Washington

leads me to speak of two social events

that occurred here last week, the reception

of the Mexican Minister and the Diplomatic

reception at the White House. These

were the two events of the season thus

far, and are said to have surpassed in ex-

tent and brilliancy anything before seen

in Washington. Over a thousand invita-

tions were issued by the Mexican minis-

ter, and his guests included all the mem-

bers of Congress, the heads of depart-

ments, the principal military and naval

officers, members of the press, the diplo-

matic corps, and the leading citizens of

Washington. To entertain such a vast

assemblage of guests in a comfortable

manner within the limits of even a large

residence was indeed a marvel of art, but

it was done in a style that has never been

surpassed here, according to the verdict of

those who are experienced in Washington

entertainments. The illumination of the

house outside and in was a most brilliant

spectacle of itself, and the entertainment

of the vast throng at the tables in the

different rooms was not only of the most

elaborate and comprehensive character,

but accompanied with an ease that made

it in the highest degree enjoyable by

everybody present.

The reception in honor of the Diplo-

matic corps at the President's, the night

following was a still larger affair, about

two thousand invitations having been

are these changes they are not so great

as the political changes that have occurred.

I am deeply impressed with recollections

of my first visit here every time I go up

to the Capitol, and think over the scenes

and actors of by gone days. Everything

was the hands of the South in those

days. Southern men and Southern ideas

held sway in all depths of the govern-

ment. The nasal twang of the Yankee

was held in great contempt. New Eng-

land was the admiration of Washington

society. The Northern Democrats joined

in exciting and exaggerating this feeling.

It was common to speak of all anti-slavery

people as fanatics, and to denounce them

as not being entitled to decent respect or

consideration. The most extreme South-

ern views were the most aristocratic and

fashionable views, and were affected by

all the throng who came here hunting for

office, whether from the North or South.

Such men as Jeff Davis, Toombs, Slidell,

Hunter and Mason, held sway here along

with their Northern Democratic allies,

while Seward, Chase, Sumner and John

P. Hale were the despised representatives

of the rising tide of "Black Republicanism."

The Senate and the House resounded

daily with threats of dissolution, and these

threats were repeated and re-echoed by

Washington society as the orthodox

standard of political sentiment. I look in

vain for any of these old political leaders

to-day. With the exception of Alexander

H. Stephens, of Georgia, I do not recognize

a single Southern man who was in Congress

in the days of Frank Pierce's administration,

when I first visited Washington.

ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS.

I remember the first time I ever saw

this remarkable remnant of the old re-

gime. It was in 1856, in the days when

the two houses of Congress met in the

old halls of the original Capitol building.

Stephens was sitting at a wood fire at one

end of the lobby that surrounded the

floor of the House in those days, quietly

smoking a cigar, and I was introduced to

him by Congressman Albright, who rep-

resented the Belmont (O.) district at that

time. He had on a colored necktie, and

two ends of which stood out like prongs

from his shirt bosom. His hair was

banged in front, as it is to-day, his com-

plexion quiet, his bloodless, and his eyes

dark and piercing, as they still are. He

is to-day the sole survivor of the House

of Representatives as I then looked upon it.

And speaking of this remarkable man, I

must digress far enough to refer to a visit

that I made to his rooms at the National

Hotel the other evening. Col. T. P. Shan-

cross, of Wheeling, is an old friend of

Stephens, and he too has rooms at the

National when here on Postoffice duty.

He plays whist with the old man every

friday, and he said to me, as I met

him at the office of the National, "don't

you want to go up and see Stephens?"

Of course I did, and so I went up at once.

It was about 9 o'clock in the evening, and

the game of whist was over, but the old

man was still in his rolling chair in his

bed room, sitting there with his hat on

a hand on either wheel and moving him-

self gently back and forward, as if seeking

diversion from nervous restlessness. He

impresses you at first as a very old man,

so withered and bloodless in his appear-

ance, but when he begins to talk and you

get the range of his bright eyes, and listen

to his easy conversation, this impression

wears off. You do not think of his age or

bodily decrepitude, but only of his won-

derful memory in regard to public affairs

and of the vigor and keenness of his dis-

cussion of them. He was in a good talk-

ing mood during our visit and delivered

himself somewhat on Presidential matters.

He abominates Tilden, and does not think

the Democracy can carry New York either

with or without Tilden. He prefers John

Sherman to Tilden, if we are to have a

continuation of the present financial pol-

icy, because, as he says, Sherman is an

honest man. He spoke of Presidential

political conventions as assemblages of

political tramps, and repeated what Ben-

ton said of them in his last illness. "I

never," said Benton, "was in a gambling

house, nor in a house of ill-fame, nor in a

Presidential political convention, and I

speak of them in the order of my abhor-

rence of them."

Strange as it may seem, Stephens is not

opposed to a third term. He did not say

that he favored Grant for a third term,

but he did say that he favored Grant for

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